

## Corps cuts jetty cost

New plan for Ponce extension still creates waves with surfers

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PORT ORANGE -- The Army Corps of Engineers has succeeded in cutting the cost of the planned extension of the south jetty at Ponce de Leon Inlet. They have not succeeded in quieting the cries of New Smyrna Beach surfers, however, many of whom fear an extended jetty could tame their beloved break.

The Corps unveiled a new jetty extension plan and a new cost -- \$14.8 million, down from \$18.6 million -- at a meeting of local officials hosted by U.S. Rep. Suzanne Kosmas, D-New Smyrna Beach, on Friday afternoon at Port Orange City Hall.

Corps officials explained how using native rocks and changing the design cut \$3.8 million, and how the new design -- a straight 900-foot extension of the jetty in line with what surfers suggested in 2005 -- better preserves the consistent waves than the old design, a 1,000-foot dogleg jetty that would have angled south to run parallel with the north jetty.

"The Corps, remarkably and to their great credit, embraced the community's concerns and responded in design," Volusia County Coastal Division Director Joe Nolin said. "We feel that was a watershed moment."

Mike Martin, 60, a longtime local surfer, was less impressed with the Corps' presentation.

"It has the potential to destroy our surfing industry in New Smyrna," Martin said of the extended jetty after the meeting.

County officials have identified the jetty extension as a priority for more than a decade as a way to calm the waters in the Ponce de Leon Inlet, making it safer for boat travel and stemming the flow of sand, which requires the Army Corps to

dredge the inlet every few years to keep it open.

Surfers oppose the project, though, for fear a longer jetty will lower the waves that have earned New Smyrna Beach a reputation as the most consistent surfing spot on the East Coast of the United States.

Nolin pointed out Friday that the 4,200-foot north jetty and 2,700-foot south jetty actually improved surfing conditions when they were built in 1971.

"There's no evidence that this jetty extension won't improve the surfing breaks ... that this surfing area won't just be enhanced," he said.

Volusia County Manager Jim Dinneen said regardless of surfers' fears, the dredging and safety issues in Ponce de Leon Inlet need to be solved.

"You've got people who are afraid of the unknown," Dinneen said. "We know what all the knowns are, and it's not working, and it's creating an unsafe condition. ... The known is really a pretty unacceptable solution for actually the majority of people who use the inlet."

While the surfers won't get relief from county officials, they might get some from bureaucratic red tape.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection's permit for the project, which has already been extended five years, expires in July 2011. Corps Project Manager Shelley Trulock explained Friday that DEP requires the permit extend through the entire construction process, and she needs a one-year extension. DEP has said it won't grant a one-year extension, though, and that Trulock needs to apply for a whole new permit, which could take months.

Trulock's bosses are also putting up a roadblock. Corps officials are requiring all the funding be in place before signing off on the Project Partnership Agreement, the final document certifying the project. This news frustrated Rep. Kosmas, who said she knows of the Corps signing agreements on other projects without all the funding in place.

"I'm having a hard time swallowing this," Kosmas said.

The price tag is being split 57 percent to 43 percent between the federal government and Volusia County, and the county has its \$6.4 million available, according to County Chairman Frank Bruno.

Trulock said \$2.3 million in federal funding is locked in, leaving about \$6 million for Kosmas to find to get the job going.

She acknowledged that getting appropriations from Congress this year will be difficult.

The uncertainty over funding makes the tentative Nov. 1 start date for the eight-month project extra-tentative, Trulock said. The uncertainty over the impact on the surf weighed heavier on Martin's mind.

"We had the same assurances 40 years ago that this was going to stabilize the channel," Martin said. "We're unsure if this will achieve its purpose, and we're pretty certain that it will impact the surfing somehow."